(c) whether bio-farms growing medicinal plants, have been set up in any of the States/areas; if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI RAJNATH SINGH): (a) to (c) The Government of India is promoting bio-farming through the use of organic sources of nutrients such as green manure, farm yard manure, compost, bio-fertilizer & vermin-compost in all the States including Orissa. No proposal from the State of Orissa has been received specific for the bio-farm. However, based on a proposal received from the Government of Orissa, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) had approved, on 3.11.2002, an Agri-Export Zone for Ginger and Turmeric in Orissa State, which included the organic production of Ginger. No Bio-farm for growing medicinal plants has been set up by the Government of India.

Efficiency in Railways

†*288. SHRIMATI MAYA SINGH: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a dialogue with the Railways personnel has been held directly to improve the efficiency in Railways and to stop rail accidents so that the deficiencies could be removed;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of other steps being taken to remove the deficiencies?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) to (c) To improve efficiency and productivity of Indian Railways, regular dialogue is held with representatives of railway personnel. The deliberations, encompassing various issues related to railway operation and management are a continuous process. They have led to improved industrial relations, better working environment, higher job satisfaction, along with higher safety consciousness.

Recently, a two-day workshop on Safety on Indian Railways was held, wherein representatives of organized labour, officers' associations,

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

General Managers and senior officers of all Zonal Railways participated to discuss various aspects of safety threadbare.

Various steps taken by Indian Railways, as well as continuous efforts being made, to reduce accidents and further improve safety, have been brought out in detail in the White Paper on Safety on Indian Railways presented to the Parliament on 7.4.2003.

Accreditation of technical and educational institutions

*289. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that as per the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on the state of our Technical and Educational Institutions, none of the 171 Institutes audited by them could fulfil the AICTE requirements necessary for accreditation; and

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (DR. MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI): (a) and (b) As per Section 10 (k) of the AICTE Act, 1987, AICTE grants approval for starting new technical institutions and introducting new courses/increasing intake following a prescribed procedure. Accreditation of programmes is different from approval process. It is a process of quality assurance. AICTE has set up the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) in terms of Section 10(u) of the Act. The 171 Institutions test-checked in audit and mentioned in the Report of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India (C&AG) were accorded approval by AICTE during the period 1997-98 to 2001-02. As per the NBA guidelines, the minimum eligibility criteria for a programme to be considered for accreditation is that, at least two batches must have passed out from the concerned programme. As such, most of the institutions that were established during the period of report i.e. 1997-98 to 2001-02 were not eligible for accreditation. The response for accreditation in the earlier years was poor due to lack of understanding and appreciation of the process involved. In order to encourage the institutions for getting their programmes accredited, AICTE has so far conducted 49 awareness workshops and 14 training workshops.